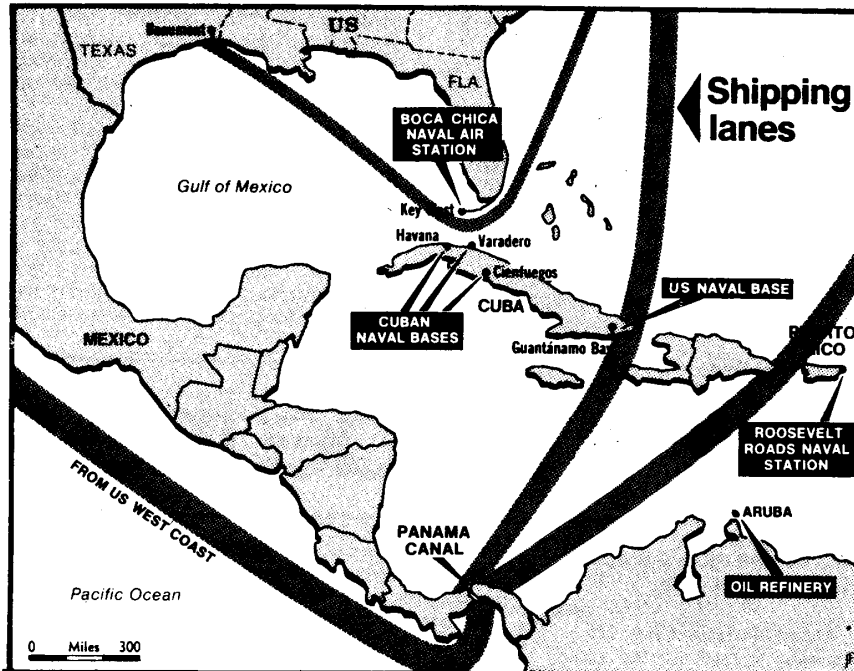


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# Cuba-Soviet 'threat' to US shipping lanes



the President's deepest concern over Cuba may not be his re-election hopes, or even the 2,000-3,000 Soviet troops there. US defense planners are concerned over a possible future short-term Soviet nuisance challenge from Cuba to US supply lines running through the Caribbean to Europe.

NATO depends on sea lines of communication for 80 percent of its essential supplies, energy in particular. US energy supplies include Venezuelan and other oil refined at Aruba, in the Netherlands Antilles Islands, which moves by tanker.

At present, two submarines and 28 fast patrol boats, supplied to Cuba by the Soviet Union and armed with Styx missiles of the type that sank the Israeli destroyer Eilat off Egypt in 1967, operate from Cuban bases. These were recently reinforced by two fast Turya-class hydrofoil boats. Such ships would require now-nonexistent air cover for extended operations but could mount sneak attacks or challenge a US blockade of Cuba.

US reinforcement strategy for NATO is based partly on flying three additional divisions to Europe, where some of their equipment would be prepositioned. But other equipment, and five or more further divisions, would have to be moved by sea aboard Military Sealift Command vessels and merchant ships of the National Defense Reserve fleet and NATO countries.

The closest port to Europe near home bases of three key US Army divisions — the 2nd Armored, 1st Mechanized, and 5th Infantry — is Beaumont, Texas, on the Gulf of Mexico. Three others, the 7th, 9th and 25th infantry divisions, based in Hawaii, Washington State, and California, would normally move by sea through the Panama Canal, then eastward south of Cuba.

Although Cuban bases would be vulnerable to US strikes, some analysts estimate that US commanders might be hesitant to use Beaumont or other Gulf ports because of the possibility of Soviet-Cuban harassment. This would add to their arrival time in Europe.

Soviet intelligence facilities in Cuba are believed to have, already, the capability to eavesdrop on US shipping, air movements, and communications, at least to the extent of being able to support hit-and-run missile-boat attacks.

Acting on communications intercepts, the forces based at Cuba's naval bases in Havana, Cienfuegos (where there is submarine capability), Cabanas, Mariel, and Varadero, and the present squadron of MIG-23 and MIG-27 supersonic aircraft, could prove to have more than nuisance value against US convoys, especially if they were reinforced.

A further concern in the Caribbean, as in other seaways, is potential Soviet mine-laying capability. US Navy experts believe the Soviet fleet now has the edge in mine-sweeping and mine-laying capability. Mines and mine-laying gear carried hidden aboard merchant ships are difficult or impossible to detect by normal intelligence means.

## Defense analysts say Carter's moves help protect traffic from Panama Canal, Gulf ports

By John K. Cooley  
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Washington

Soviet forces in Cuba, especially if increased, could threaten US ability to quickly reinforce Western Europe by sea in an emergency, administration defense analysts say.

This is one of the most important, though least-publicized, reasons for stepped-up US surveillance of Cuba, announced by President Carter Oct. 3 and actually begun Oct. 5.

It is also one reason that maneuvers such as the coming Navy and Marine Corps beach landings and firing exercises at the US base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, are more than a mere public-relations exercise for the Carter administration.

President Carter said Oct. 9 his measures had "adequately" responded to the threat from Soviet troops in Cuba, which had now been "isolated."

The ability to move US forces swiftly from the Pacific through the Gulf of Mexico to Western Europe is a critical point of the so-called US "swing strategy," approved by European allies of the US.

The Caribbean, now monitored by Soviet forces from Cuba, would be a critical area for the "swing strategy," because

major Navy ships, aircraft, and Army divisions would be shifted quickly through it if the Soviets attacked the NATO area in Europe.

Defense Secretary Harold Brown has ordered resumption of occasional overflights of Cuba by US reconnaissance planes. On Oct. 5, a high-altitude US Air Force SR-71 Blackbird plane made a rapid photographic pass over the island. It was the first such flight since President Carter halted them in November, 1978, as a goodwill gesture toward Premier Fidel Castro.

Earlier this week, Secretary Brown inspected the newly established Caribbean contingency task force headquarters at Boca Chica Naval Air Station at Key West, Florida. The new 100-man headquarters, commanded by Rear Adm. Thomas Replogle, is to supervise landing maneuvers soon to begin by a mixed force of 3,500 Navy and Marine Corps personnel at Guantánamo Bay, and similar future exercises including naval and air patrols.

With Admiral Replogle and Florida Rep. Dante Fascell (D), Secretary Brown addressed civic groups in Florida Oct. 8 and 9 to reassure them that President Carter's measures have "neutralized" the presence of the Soviet combat brigade in Cuba. Analysts viewed the tour as a boost for Mr. Carter's political standing in Florida.

However, administration sources indicate